

Meet Your Breeder

Stilwell Basenjis ~ Linda Stilwell

First off, thank you for the honor of inviting me to be the breeder profiled for *The Basenji* magazine.

Q. How did you get started in Basenjis?

• As with many of us, it all started with a pet. I was raised on a farm and had always had dogs, cats and various and sundry critters. When Richard and I got married in 1974, I told him I wanted a dog for my birthday. I had been working in a grooming shop, and said I wouldn't mind having a poodle but Richard said if we were going to get a dog, he wanted a Basenji. I had no clue what a Basenji was, but I started searching. We found a Basenji listed for sale in the paper that was a breeder take-back; the returned dog didn't get along with his other male so his breeder needed to place him. We got Brandy V in July of 1974. Once we were thoroughly indoctrinated and in love with Basenjis, it was all downhill. We were completely captivated with the Basenji's beauty, independence, intelligence and cunning.

Upper Right: FC Stilwell's Call The Wind Mariah, SC, FCh, LCM2 being awarded Best of Breed at the BCOA National Specialty ASFA Field Trial in 2001

Lower Right: DC Stilwell's Tirzah of Ben Hur, SC FCh LCM2

Q. Why did you start breeding? When?

• Richard and I bred our first litter in 1976 before we really knew what we were doing or what we wanted to achieve. We kept a puppy out of that litter, Stilwell's Diamond of Oryx, "Diamond," who Barbara Camp thought was a very nice dog; but we didn't show him because I didn't have a clue how to even get started in showing. Things didn't really get started with us until we bred "Diamond" Stilwell's Diamond of Oryx to Khajah's Black Tempest. That breeding produced Camp's Sir Datar Tarboy, who became our first lure courser, albeit not a very successful one, because he thought it was more fun to flirt with the girls than it was to chase that dumb bunny. More notably, that set up the breeding that produced Stilwell's Silky Sue, our first Field Champion. Silky Sue produced "Bennie", DC Stilwell's Ben Hur, SC FCh LCM. Bennie was to sire DC Stilwell's Tirzah of Ben Hur, SC FCh LCM2. Each step in our breeding program brought us closer to what we consider our greatest achievement to date, FC Stilwell's Call The Wind Mariah, SC, LCM2. Mariah distinguished herself many times over on the coursing field.



Q. What persons influenced you most strongly? Why?

I would have to say that I was most influenced by Barbara Camp and Mary DeWhitt. Barbara took me under her wing and started teaching me how to show my own dogs. Mary DeWhitt took me to shows and lure coursing trials and helped me to gain confidence in my dogs' abilities in the ring and on the field. Shirley Jones was also a big influence. I valued her friendship as well as guidance, and letting me use her as a sounding board for tossing about ideas and "what ifs".

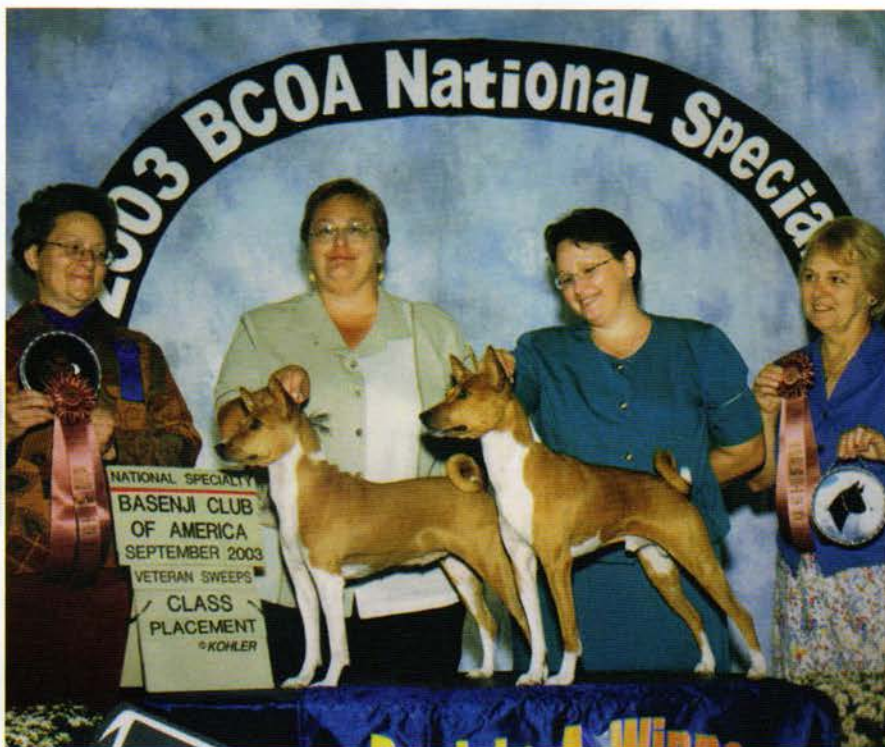


Above: FC Stilwell's Call The Wind Mariah, SC, FCh, LCM 2, "Mariah", and her daughter, DC Stilwell's Tadita Runs With The Wind, SC, MC, LCX, "Lily" chasing the bunny together



Above: FC Stilwell's Suletu Flies with the Wind, SC, MC, LCX

Below: DC Stilwell's Tadita Runs with The Wind, SC, FCh, LCX being awarded winner's bitch at the Faith City Kennel Club in March 2008



Above Left: DC Stilwell's Tirzah of Ben Hur, SC, FCh, LCM 2
Above Right: DC Stilwell's Blue Moon, SC, FCh, LCM

Q What do you feel are your most significant achievements with the breed?

Although we have shown our dogs with success in conformation, Richard and I decided early on that lure coursing was really our first love. Having made that decision, we began to develop our bloodlines for running dogs. If it turned out that they were good conformation dogs, that was a bonus. But our main emphasis was on the lure coursing. We have been very fortunate to breed some of the top dogs in the lure coursing world. Bennie was our first lure courser to really distinguish himself on the field. His greatest accomplishment, and unequaled to this date, was winning Best in Field at the ASFA International Invitational in 1989. Bennie was the #1 ASFA Basenji that year. I can't tell you what a thrill it was to see that boy run!

In all honesty, I will have to say that our greatest achievement was Mariah. She was the culmination of our years of hard work, planning and praying. From an early age, Mariah was focused on that bunny and was all business. She was everything we had ever dreamed of and more. I don't think it is any secret that one well known lure coursing judge has said that Mariah was the dog he judged all lure coursing Basenjies by. Yes, I consider that a great achievement.

We lost Mariah late last year but her last litter is showing the talent handed down from their mother. Lily, DC Stilwell's Tadita Runs with The Wind, SC, FCh, LCX, especially, is carrying on in her mother's footsteps, already racking up several titles, as well as her sister, Sulie, FC Stilwell's Suletu flies With the Wind, SC, MC, LCX, who has won two BIFs. Lily will be taking time off this fall to raise our next generation of Stilwell running dogs.



Above: DC Stilwell's Blue Moon, SC, FCh, LCM

Q • What dogs you've seen or owned stand out as examples of the breed and why?

Well, there are two old time dogs that in my mind are outstanding. I have always thought that Circus Boy of the Bambuti was an excellent dog, possessing a near perfect headpiece in my opinion. The other dog that I see as a stunning example of the breed was Sir Datar of Horsley. Datar always struck me as being the epitome of the "well balanced, correct Basenji". His bearing and attitude were regal. To me those two dogs were classic and I would have been proud to say I had bred either of them.

“Any breeding should be made with an eye toward producing a dog that will live a long, healthy life and be a source of joy to its people.”

Below: FC Stilwell's Call The Wind Mariah, SC, FCh, LCM 2



Q • What advice do you have to a new breeder getting started?

Advice for prospective breeders? Lots! There is much to be considered before undertaking a breeding program. First of all, consider the breed. The Basenji is truly a unique dog and cannot be likened to any other breed. Not always easy to live with, they are thinkers (and in many cases...stinkers!). Many will scoff at that statement, but I've lived with these dogs for 36 years and have been on the losing end of their considered opinions more times than I care to admit. They are, by turns, charming, devious, cunning, ingratiating, stubborn and compliant when they wish to be. They are not going to fit seamlessly into anyone's life.

The next big thing to consider is where you want to GO with a breeding program. A breeding should never be planned without knowing the next step you are going to take. You should have done enough research to be able to plot the next breeding (for a puppy you keep) and so forth and so on. You should have a clear picture of what you want to accomplish with your program.

The last and probably the most important thing to consider is placement of your puppies. Selling/placing puppies is a serious responsibility. You must keep in mind that these puppies that you brought into the world are going to be totally dependent on the people you send them home with. Heavy? You bet! It takes a lot of homework.

Find a mentor, someone you trust, who will help guide you in the direction you want to go, whether this be for breeding, showing, lure coursing, agility, obedience or other dog activities. Seek out someone knowledgeable in the sport you're interested in and learn from them.

Below: FC Stilwell's Suletu Flies with the Wind, SC, MC, LCX





Above: DC Stilwell's Ben Hur, SC, LCM winning Best of Breed at the 1989 ASFA International Invitational

Q • What do you think today's Basenji breeders need to pay special attention to?

What needs attention? That's a good one! Health has to be at the top of the list. There are far too many breeders who breed for wins and leave health concerns in the dust. In my opinion, a litter should never even be considered without doing a complete background check on health issues in the bloodlines of the intended participants. Any breeding should be made with an eye toward producing a dog that will live a long, healthy life and be a source of joy to its people. One should never knowingly produce a dog with the prospect of a grossly shortened life due to an inherited disease. Careful breeding --not to just breed a dog that will win in the ring, but one that is capable of being an "all-around" hound -- should be a well defined goal. Sadly, many Basenjis have already lost their hunting instinct.

Below: Stilwell's Sweet Sunshine, FCh, LCM 2



Q • What have you seen improve in Basenjis over the years?

The most notable improvements I have seen in the breed I would say, without a doubt, have been temperament, topline and tail curl and sets. When I first began showing, many judges were truly afraid of Basenjis because of the bad temperament. Thankfully, today it is rare to see bad temperament in Basenjis.



Above and Below: FC Stilwell's Call The Wind Mariah, SC, FCh, LCM 2



Q • Anything else you would like to add?

I think I've pretty much said it all. It has been a long road, and at times a hard one, but worth it. Richard and I have certainly had our share of triumphs and defeats. Anyone who breeds dogs knows the highs and lows, the heartaches and the celebrations. The most important thing to us is that we have tried to conform to high standards in our breeding, and to keep sight of our goal to breed healthy, "all-around" hounds. We have never bred on a large scale and don't want to. We all know there is and never will be that "perfect dog" but if the dogs we breed are healthy, happy and love to chase the bunny, we have accomplished what we set out to do.